



Nevada Site Office News

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Environmental Investigations Conducted At Former Nuclear Test Site

The U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration Nevada Site Office (NNSA/NSO) is on location in northwestern New Mexico this summer to conduct environmental cleanup activities at a former nuclear test site. The site, known as Gasbuggy, is situated approximately 55 miles east of Farmington, New Mexico, and was the location of an underground nuclear test conducted in 1967.

The NNSA/NSO and contractor staff will conduct excavation and remediation activities this summer to remove diesel-contaminated soils from the Gasbuggy site. The contaminated soils are a result of the drilling operations conducted prior to the test itself and are restricted to the mud pits which were designed and built to contain the drilling fluids. Work is scheduled to be completed by the end of September 2004.

Gasbuggy was conducted under the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission's (predecessor to the U.S. Department of Energy [DOE]) Plowshare Program, which sought to develop peaceful applications for atomic energy. Gasbuggy was a twenty-nine kiloton test detonated at a depth of 4,240 feet below ground surface. The purpose of Gasbuggy was to increase natural gas production using a nuclear explosion to stimulate natural gas recovery by fracturing gas-bearing formations in tight underground reservoirs. The test was conducted in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Interior and the El Paso Natural Gas Company, and was the first joint government-industry experiment of its kind, as well as the first nuclear gas stimulation experiment.

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The Atomic Energy Commission performed an initial site cleanup to decommission, or close down, the site in 1978. Since that time, the DOE has conducted various surveys and radiological sampling efforts to monitor the surrounding environment. Sampling results confirm that there is no surface radiological contamination. Work performed in the summer of 2002 verified previous results, and identified areas where petroleum hydrocarbons, used to support test activities, were mixed into surrounding soils. Any waste that is generated from this cleanup will be disposed of at an off site location.

Gasbuggy is one of eight nuclear test sites located outside the Nevada Test Site boundary that is managed by the NNSA/NSO Environmental Management Offsites Program. The Offsites Program is responsible for addressing possible contamination associated with underground nuclear tests conducted in Mississippi, Nevada, Alaska, Colorado, and New Mexico, and carrying out appropriate corrective actions at these sites. If you would like additional details regarding the ongoing project, contact the NNSA/NSO Office of Public Affairs at (702) 295-3521.